

THE USE OF ARABIC CONSONANT SOUNDS TO ARRIVE AT ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION: A CASE STUDY ON INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS IN TERTIARY LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

The intention of this study is to reveal how several Arabic consonant sounds are employed in teaching English pronunciation to Indonesian EFL students in university level. This study was conducted qualitatively as it constituted describing and analyzing the data without influencing them in any way. The research subjects were second-semester freshmen students who took Basic Speaking in English Language Education Department, University of Muhammadiyah Malang. Furthermore, participant observation in two consecutive meetings was conducted to gather the data. The findings have revealed 1) there are three Hijaiyah letters used to assist the students to produce correct pronunciation, namely ث, ذ, and ش which correspond /θ/, /ð/, and /ʃ/ respectively, 2) the techniques comprise reading a short passage, tongue twister game, the use of phonetic transcription, sound imitation, and pronunciation drill, and 3) the implementation of the aforementioned techniques was conducted consecutively, both before and after the introduction of Hijaiyah letters.

KEYWORDS

Arabic consonant sounds, English consonant sounds, Indonesian EFL students, Tertiary level

INTRODUCTION

In teaching pronunciation, many ESL teachers have made use various popular classroom techniques, for instance drilling, tongue twisters, listening and imitating, dialogues, and so on (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). In addition to these trendy techniques, some ESL teachers also employ modern techniques, e.g. computer software and Internet to teach pronunciation—although these modern ways are still less appealing vis-à-vis the traditional classroom techniques (Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu, 2010).

However, regardless of many techniques that have been used in teaching pronunciation, several studies suggest that Indonesian students still tend to find it burdensome to learn English pronunciation (Dardjowidjojo, 1978; Mathew, 2003; Nguyen, 2011; Pallawa and Alam, 2013). Moreover, Dardjowidjojo (1978) argues that this situation is due to a number of phonological distinctions, which exist between Bahasa Indonesia and English. Both languages have several different phonological systems, such as seen in some speech sounds which are evident in English, but not in Bahasa Indonesia, and vice versa.

Meanwhile, as said by Lestiono and Gusdian (2017a), in spite of the differences among languages in the world, these languages somehow still share quite a few likenesses; one of the resemblances is noticeable in their phonetic aspects in which different languages may share some similar speech sounds. Javed (2013) found that English and Arabic—which are completely different languages as they came from distinct roots—surprisingly share some similar consonants, i.e. /θ/, /ð/, and /ʃ/. Therefore, these similarities may help Arabic students to learn pronouncing English words, which contain these targeted sounds accurately.

In line with the abovementioned study by Javed (2013) as well as the assumption that Indonesian EFL students are mostly Moslems and able to read Quran, which is written in Arabic, Lestiono and Gusdian (2017a) conducted a piloting study on whether or not

Indonesian EFL students are capable of pronouncing several English words using their familiarity with several Arabic consonants. The result of this study indicated that Arabic consonants did assist Indonesian EFL students to pronounce several targeted English words. In addition, another study, also conducted by Lestiono and Gusdian (2017b), revealed that the speech sound transcription of the students who graduated from Islamic-based schools (who got much exposure to Arabic before) were mostly accurate as they pronounced the majority of the targeted English sounds correctly. Conversely, the students from regular schools (who got little Arabic exposure in their previous education) were prone to pronounce the targeted English sounds incorrectly; they often substituted the targeted sounds with the closest speech sounds they were aware of. For example, these students replaced the palato-alveolar /ʃ/ sound in 'shy' with its neighboring sound, the alveolar /s/.

As it has been already proven by the two previous studies that Arabic sounds do accommodate Indonesian EFL students to produce several consonants in English precisely; this present study is profoundly becoming a continuation of them. Therefore, it is the aim of this study to find out how Arabic consonant sounds are introduced in order to facilitate the Indonesian EFL students, especially in the tertiary level or university students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Techniques in Pronunciation Teaching

Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) explain that in rational ways, typical pronunciation class activities like focused production tasks (e.g., minimal pair drills, reading aloud, and sentence practice), pronunciation games, tongue twisters, and so on are widely used by English teachers. Through all of these techniques do teachers have their students learn accurate pronunciation and then apply it in the real context when they speak English. However not all students take the most out of it; some other students even still find it difficult to learn English pronunciation (Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu, 2010).

Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2010) also add that due to this reason, some more new techniques in pronunciation teaching are created in order to assist the existing ones; these latest techniques mainly focus on activities to improve fluency as well as accuracy at the same time and the use of authentic materials/realia, and technology. Nowadays, there are various applications, social media, and technology devices that are used in pronunciation classrooms; these sorts of equipment help teachers to create pronunciation activities for their students.

Pronunciation Issues Faced by Indonesian EFL Students

Despite various kinds of teaching techniques in pronunciation, many EFL students still have poor pronunciation that would hinder them from effective communication (Mirza, 2015; Demenko et al., 2010; Dardjowidjojo, 1978; Mathew, 2003; Nguyen, 2011; Pallawa and Alam, 2013).

In the case of EFL students in Indonesia, these difficulties may closely be connected to the major phonological difference between English and Indonesian native language, Bahasa Indonesia (Dardjowidjojo, 1978). One of these differences is observable through the consonant distinctions between both languages. For instance, there are English consonants like /θ/ and /ð/ which do not occur in Bahasa Indonesia.

According to Jarvis & Pavlenko (2008), a person who learns another language would likely do a cross-linguistic transfer. A cross-linguistic transfer itself is a situation in which a person uses his/her knowledge of a certain language to the use of different language. Mostly, a language learner would use his/her mother tongue knowledge when committing a cross-linguistic transfer to another language. There are several kinds of cross-linguistic transfers such as grammatical, morphological, and phonological transfers.

Phonological transfer is one of the cross-cultural transfers frequently done by a foreign language learner. A phonological transfer happens when a person's knowledge of

the phonological system in one language influences his/her phonological perception and production in different language (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008).

Lestiono and Gusdian (2017b) found out that Indonesian EFL students with a background of Arabic learning tend to show more accurate pronunciation when they pronounce several targeted English words. Further, Lestiono and Gusdian (2017b) revealed that their accurate pronunciation may be affected by their phonological knowledge of Arabic they got back then while studying in Islamic based schools. Therefore, it can be assumed that the Arabic phonological transfer to English pronunciation may facilitate Indonesian EFL students to learn English pronunciation.

Arabic and English Consonants

In Arabic, there are 28 sounds categorized based on the place of articulation as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Arabic Consonants

Consonant Types	Sounds
Labial	/w/, /m/, /b/, and /f/
Dental	/n/, /l/, /d/, /θ/, /ð/, /ðˤ/, /t/ and /tˤ/
Alveolar	/d/, /s/, /ʃ/, /z/, /sˤ/, and /r/
Palatal	/tʃ/, /j/
Semi-glottal	/h/, /ħ/, /ʕ/, and /ʔ/
Glottal	/k/, /q/, /ɣ/, and /x/

(Adapted from Bosha, 2008)

English Consonants

There are 24 consonant sound realizations in English phonetic system. In relation to the place of articulation, these consonants are categorized as seen from Table 2.

Table 2. English Consonants

Consonant Types	Sounds
Bilabial	/p/, /m/, /b/
Labio-dental	/w/, /f/, /v/
Dental	/θ/, /ð/
Alveolar	/t/, /d/, /n/, /l/, /r/, /s/, /z/
Palato-Alveolar	/ʃ/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /ʒ/
Palatal	/j/
Velar	/k/, /g/, /ŋ/
Glottal	/h/

(Adapted from Todd, 1987)

As seen above, in spite of numerous differences, English and Arabic consonants share a couple of similarities; for example, dental consonant sounds /θ/ and /ð/ exist in both languages. Therefore, such likeness may facilitate people who speak both languages to pronounce words containing these certain sounds in either English or Arabic.

RESEARCH METHOD

This current study employed a case study, which belongs to qualitative research design as it aimed to thoroughly observe, analyze, and describe the case of how Arabic sounds were used in the English pronunciation classroom. The subjects of this current study were 25 students in one Basic Speaking class convened by one of the researchers. As this

is the basic level of a speaking class, all of the students were freshmen who were still in their second semester in the ELED of UMM. Furthermore, these students come from various regions across Indonesia with different backgrounds, including the students who graduated from Islamic based schools with presumably much exposure to Arabic and other students coming from public schools with limited or even no exposure to Arabic at their previous schools.

As an important basis of collecting data, observation was used in this current study. The observation itself was to rely on narratives in describing the things, behaviors, and interactions that were connected to the employment of several Arabic consonant sounds in introducing some targeted English consonant sounds. In addition, the type of the observation in this study was participant observation as the researchers actively involved in the classroom activities in which the data collection was taken place. The observations were conducted in two meetings consecutively; this was done in order to obtain richer findings. During the observations, the researchers also recorded the classroom activities using a video camera as the instrument. The use of this recorder would help the researchers with the data analysis in the following stage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the observations conducted in two meetings, there have been several findings revealed in this study, namely the targeted sounds, pronunciation teaching techniques, and implementation.

The Targeted Sounds

The lecturer used Hijaiyah letters that directly correspond with each one of the targeted English sounds. The chart containing the corresponding letters and sounds is presented below:

Table 3. Hijaiyah-English Consonant Corresponding Chart

English Sounds	Hijaiyah Letters
/θ/	ث
/ð/	ذ
/ʃ/	ش

The targeted sounds in the abovementioned chart are employed according to the findings of Lestiono and Gusdian (2017b) which expose that many of Indonesian EFL students frequently make errors when pronouncing /θ/, /ð/, and /ʃ/ sounds. The errors themselves are related to the fact that the Indonesian EFL learners do not have these sounds in their native language. Accordingly, they might see these sounds unfamiliar for them to pronounce (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

Besides, the notion that most Indonesian students are Moslems and familiar with Quran as well as the fact that the students also study in a campus with a touch of Islam (meaning that they also have an Islamic science class where they have to learn reciting Quran) may make the lecturer assume that the students know the Hijaiyah letters very well. Some basic Hijaiyah letters ث, ذ, and ش are employed. In the classroom activities, moreover, when the lecturer introduced the students to the Hijaiyah letters, the students looked very familiar with the letters as they could recognize all of them.

All of these targeted sounds appear in both English and Arabic but not Bahasa Indonesia (Todd 1987; Boshu 2008; Dardjowidjojo, 1978). There are two dental consonants, the voiceless /θ/ and voiced /ð/, and voiced alveolar sound /ʃ/, and these sounds are represented in Hijaiyah letters as ث, ذ, and ش respectively.

In the observation, it is perceived that before being introduced to the corresponding Hijaiyah letters, the students found it problematic to pronounce words comprising the targeted sounds. For example, the students mispronounced /ʃ/, /θ/, and /ð/ sounds in 'shy', 'three', and 'those' respectively; they mostly used the neighboring consonants, such as /s/ and /d/ to replace them. Then after they found out that these sounds are similar to the spelling of the Hijaiyah letters, most of them got to pronounce them correctly. This indicates that students' phonological knowledge in Arabic has influenced their learning English pronunciation. This is in line with Jarvis and Pavlenko's cross-linguistic transfer (2008). Further, Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) also mention that in cross-linguistic transfer, there are both positive and negative transfers. Positive transfer occurs when the phonological transfer can facilitate the learning process in pronunciation; while the negative one is the opposite. As for this finding, a positive transfer has been detected as the students' knowledge of Hijaiyah letters do accommodate them to pronounce the targeted sounds in English words. For example, after being introduced to ث as the corresponding letter of /θ/, the students eventually got it right when pronouncing 'thumb' as /θʌm/ and 'bath' as /bæθ/ (formerly, they pronounced them as /tʌm/ and /bæt/).

The Pronunciation Teaching Techniques

In the teaching and learning process, it was observed that the lecturer used several general techniques as those commonly implemented in the teaching of pronunciation. These techniques included reading a short passage, tongue twister game, the use of phonetic transcription, sound imitation, and also pronunciation drill. In reading a short passage, the lecturer gave the students a short passage containing the targeted English consonants; then each one of the students was to read aloud the passage. Presumably, the lecturer asked them to do so in order to diagnose the students' ability in pronouncing the words with the targeted English sounds. As results, before being introduced to Hijaiyah letters, most students showed inconsistencies in pronouncing English words; for instance, for some words containing /ð/ like 'father', 'mother', and 'brother' they mostly get them right; however, for words like 'them' and 'they', many of the students mispronounce them using 'd' sound.

Another technique that the lecturer employed to diagnose the students' pronunciation was tongue twister game; in this sort of word game the lecturer showed several sentences of which words were somewhat similar but contained slightly different phonemes, such as 'Thirty-three thousand students think that Thursday is their thirteenth birthday'. In this sentence, the lecturer played with the words consisting /θ/ sounds. The students were one by one to read aloud the sentences. Many of the students felt challenged to try this tongue twister game. The activity was quite fun yet rather disturbing (mainly before the introduction of the Hijaiyah letters) in some ways as many of the students made mistakes in pronouncing the sentences as they seemed to find it difficult and confusing to do a rapid alternation from one word to another (moreover, all of the words were almost similarly pronounced). Besides, some students also seemed to repeatedly mispronounce /θ/ with /t/ sound, /ð/ with /d/, and /ʃ/ with /s/ in all sentences.

The lecturer also made use of phonetic transcription of the targeted sounds; those are /θ/, /ð/, and /ʃ/. It is understandable that the lecturer employed International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) transcription, as they are English department students who are supposed to understand and be able to read IPA transcription. Besides, pronunciation through IPA transcription is also one of the materials taught in the Basic Speaking class. In implementing this technique, the lecturer showed these phonetic transcriptions to the students through an LCD projector. The lecturer introduced them to these targeted sound transcriptions as well as their equivalent pronunciation.

It is perceived that when the lecturer introduced the targeted sound in isolation, all students seemed to understand and be able to repeat the lecturer's example in spelling the sounds both in isolation and embedded with words.

The other techniques implemented by the lecturer were imitating the targeted sounds and pronunciation drill. In doing so, the lecturer mainly asked the students to imitate her in pronouncing the words containing the targeted sound for several times. Meanwhile, the drilling activity was in a form of minimal pair drill in which the lecturer gave the students a list of word pairs for exercises. As it is a minimal pair drill, the words in the list only differ in one phoneme; and of course the phonemes appear in the drill are /θ/ versus /s/, /ð/ versus /d/, and /ʃ/ versus /s/. The word lists of the minimal pairs are presented in the following table:

Table 4. Minimal Pair Word List

/θ/ and /s/	
thumb	sum
birth	burst
thorough	sorrow
think	sink
Thor	soar
/ð/ and /d/	
thy	die
brother	broader
leather	ladder
with	wider
though	dough
/ʃ/ and /s/	
she	sea
ship	sip
lash	lass
shoot	soot
shoo	sue

It is observable from the table that each one of the targeted sounds is being compared with its neighboring sound in which these neighboring sounds are the ones the students often use as the replacement of the targeted sounds. This matches with Lestiono and Gusdian (2017b) who disclose that many Indonesian ESL students tend to replace unfamiliar sounds with the neighboring sounds existing in their native Bahasa Indonesia, for instance they replace /θ/ with /s/, /ð/ with /d/, and /ʃ/ with /s/.

All of the abovementioned techniques were implemented not only before the introduction of the corresponding Hijaiyah letters but also after the students got to know these letters for their English pronunciation. In other words, the lecturer used these techniques twice in two meetings (the step-by-step implementation is to be explained later).

In addition, it is also attained that all of the techniques used by the lecturer belong to the traditional way in teaching pronunciation. This is in line with Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) who posit that teachers classically employ phonetic transcriptions and activities like transcription practice, focused production tasks (e.g., minimal pair drills, sentence practice, and reading aloud/recitation), and games (e.g., tongue twister and pronunciation bingo). Further, Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2010) state that these sorts of techniques mainly focus on accuracy-building activities.

Implementation

This pronunciation teaching was done in two consecutive meetings for two weeks. In the first meeting, the lecturer started with reading a short passage as a diagnostic activity for the students. The short passage itself contains a number of words comprising the three targeted sounds as seen in the excerpt below.

*'In the enchanting small village by the Jericho beach lives a **shy** girl named **Thelma**. **Thelma's birthday** was on Tuesday and **she** couldn't decide how to celebrate. **She** was turning thirty and wanted this to be **special** as she wants to celebrate it herself **without** her **father**, **mother**, or **brother**...'*

In the passage, the words with the /θ/, /ð/, and /ʃ/ are typed bold. Around half of the students, taking turns, were to read the passage aloud.

Departing from reading the passage as the first diagnostic activity, the lecturer then moved to the second diagnostic stage, in which she showed the students a series of sentences for a tongue twister game. All students participated in this game. In doing so, the lecturer initially read aloud the sentence slowly; then the students were to repeat after the lecturer together slowly for several times. Next, the lecturer read aloud the sentence again, but this time with more speed; then the students repeated after the lecturer again—also with more speed. After the class read the tongue twister sentence together, the lecturer chose each one of the students to read the sentence aloud—first slowly and then asked him/her to add up more speed.

From the first two diagnostic activities, it is perceived that more than half of the students showed some inconsistencies in producing the targeted sounds. These students got some of the words correctly pronounced; yet, they made erroneous mistakes for others. For example, in pronouncing /ʃ/, many students could produce it correctly for some words in the passage, like 'she' and 'shy'. Unfortunately, they could not produce some other words such as 'special' correctly; instead of producing the right consonant, they pronounced it using the neighboring sound, /s/. Moreover, several other students even seemed to find it problematic to pronounce the targeted sounds as they made a lot of errors. These students kept using the similar sounds like /s/, and /d/ to replace the targeted sounds. However, there were also a few numbers of students who were able to produce most of the targeted sounds accurately.

This finding, once again, confirms Dardjowidjojo (1978) and Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) that unfamiliar sounds (in this case the targeted English consonants) may be difficult to pronounce for Indonesian students due to the non-existence of several sounds of the target language in their native tongue. Therefore, the cross-linguistic transfer in the phonological aspect is inevitable.

Moving onto the next technique, the lecturer showed a slide of an articulatory organ on the screen and explained how /θ/, /ð/, and /ʃ/ are produced. The lecturer also highlighted all of the IPA transcriptions although there were only three targeted sound realizations being the center of the discussion. From this finding, it is apparent that the lecturer still adopts the traditional way of using IPA in building the students' accurate pronunciation (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). It is somehow still understandable and relevant as they are English department students in which they are expected to be able to read the IPA. Although they would not get this IPA until their Phonology class in the following semester, at least it is still good for them to have an encounter of such material beforehand so that they can expect what to learn.

The last technique implemented by the lecturer before the Hijaiyah introduction is pronunciation drill—minimal pair. The lecturer showed the list in table 4 and gave a model of how to pronounce the words accurately before the students repeated altogether. And then, the lecturer drilled the students, one by one, to pronounce every word for several times. In this activity, some students still made some mistakes, especially when pronouncing the two targeted consonants, /θ/ and /ð/.

In the second meeting, the lecturer started with showing a picture of Hijaiyah letters to the students and asked them whether they knew how to produce each of the letters. In order to do so, the lecturer asked them randomly how to produce each of these letters—especially ث, ذ, and ش. It turned out that most students seemed to know perfectly well how to pronounce these Hijaiyah letters (this is quite reasonable since their campus is an Islamic-based institution where the vast majority of the students are Moslem and expected to be able to read Quran). In the following activity, the lecturer introduced table 3 (Hijaiyah-English corresponding sounds) to the students. Table 3 raised the students' awareness that the letters actually correspond the targeted sounds; it is observable from the students' expressions that showed surprise and excitement after knowing this fact.

Then, the subsequent activities were the repeated ones from those in the first meeting (this time was a bit different because of the introduction of the Hijaiyah letters as well as the order of the activities); here, the lecturer continued by showing table 4 (containing minimal pair word list) to the students once again and asked them to pronounce the words together. From this, it was observed that the students pronounced the words correctly. Then, the lecturer asked them again one by one to pronounce some words pointed by the lecturer; as expected, these students got nearly zero mistake (some students sometimes still mispronounced /θ/ and /ð/ as /t/ and /d/ respectively; however, they could directly correct it themselves without the lecturer's help).

Subsequently, the students were brought back to the IPA transcriptions of the targeted sounds, /θ/, /ð/, and /ʃ/. The lecturer emphasized that the production of these three English sounds are exactly not unlike those of the three corresponding Hijaiyah letters, ث, ذ, and ش. In other words, the lecturer tried to raise the students' awareness of their pronunciation likeliness.

Lastly, the lecturer went back to the tongue twister game; but this time, the students were to find, by themselves, a short passage containing the targeted English sounds and make up their own tongue twisters containing some word plays out of the passage. As the result, it is evident that the students not only had fun with the activities, but also—more importantly—they made fewer pronunciation errors (despite, of course, their 'twisted' tongue for the game).

This discovery reveals that as the students have become attentive of their knowledge about Hijaiyah letter, they can use this knowledge to help them pronounce the targeted English sounds. In other words, these Arabic consonants do facilitate students in their learning English pronunciation. It literally supports the previous study by Lestiono and Gusdian (2017a), which shows similar result. In addition, this finding also confirms Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) about the positive cross-linguistic transfer, in which the students positively do a phonological transfer from their knowledge of Arabic to English in order to help them with the pronunciation accuracy.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Arabic sounds are positively helpful for facilitating the Indonesian EFL students to learn English pronunciation. This is highly related to the similarity found in both languages (English and Arabic) especially their consonants. Students' acquaintance with Hijaiyah letters, especially ث, ذ, and ش, can accommodate them in producing the correct pronunciation of /θ/, /ð/, and /ʃ/ singly. Besides, the techniques that have been applied in this pronunciation teaching (reading a short passage, tongue twister game, the use of phonetic transcription, sound imitation, and also pronunciation drill) are mainly the further implications to be used by more foreign language, to be particular, English teachers.

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